

Chair's Comments, Politics/International Relations Section Conference I

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Dr. Nakayama Toshihiro presented a paper entitled “Politics of National Security: Generals, Civilians, and the Framing of the Iraq War,” which tried to examine the impact and implications of the Iraq War on U. S. domestic politics after the 2006 midterm election. He successfully attempted to stress the recurring tendency in the U. S. to see foreign policy as an extension of domestic policy.

Nakayama argued that although national security issues would no doubt remain a serious election issue in this election cycle, it may no longer be the dominant issue for the 2008 election as it was for the 2006 election. The surge policy that was announced in midst of deep skepticism towards President's war policy became “General's Policy,” which was the meaning of the “Petraeusization” of the Iraq War, which in turn had the effect of putting the damper on the war criticism. In Nakayama's view, the “surge policy” may have been Bush Administration's last gift to the GOP.

Dr. Machidori Satoshi, a specialist of Congressional politics, made a couple of comments on Professor Nakayama's paper. His first point was related to the strategies of the Bush Administration and the Republican Party. He asked Nakayama why the Bush Administration and the Republican Party seem intent on focusing the electorate's attention on economic issues.

Machidori's second comment was about how the congressional testimony by General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker affected the public evaluation of the Bush's foreign policy. He is not convinced that the congressional testimony directly had an impact on the public opinion.

Professor Mastanduno made a couple of very constructive and informative comments, too. He also suggested that the Republicans might better run on the “success” of the troop surge in Iraq on the 2008 presidential campaign, which is very different from the 2006 midterm campaign.

We got a lot of good questions from the participants, even a couple by American graduate students that are very challenging to the paper.

Perhaps a bit undertheorized, Dr. Nakayama's paper was very good addition to the seminar in the sense that it enabled us to look at the Iraq War from a domestic politics perspective. Besides, very critical of the polarized nature of the American politics that has permeated even the foreign policy debate, Nakayama would like to see a new type of “vital center internationalism” out of the current

debate on the Iraq policy. He wrote that ‘what the world do not need is variations of “dead center internationalism,” aggressive unilateralism on one hand and unilateral isolationism on the other.’ Mastanduno would insist that the U. S. foreign policy would be bound to be unilateral under either the Democratic or Republican Administration. Very probably, we could keep arguing almost endlessly whether the main thrust of the U. S. foreign policy would be anything close to what the world community would like to see the U. S. performing.

This was a good session that stimulated a number of useful queries and comments.